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DISCOURSE ON INTEMPERANCE.

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"For, how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" Esther viii, 6.

IT is painful to think of the sufferings of our fellow-men, even of those who are separated from us by country, language or religion. When, for example, tidings reach us from distant lands, of wars in which thousands perish ; or of earthquakes by which cities, towns, and villages are destroyed ; or of persecutions whose victims are doomed to exile, imprisonment, or death ; our sensibilities are awakened, and our hearts saddened. But when such calamities befall or threaten those who are more closely allied to us, our grief is proportionately deeper, and our sorrow more intense. If we cannot endure the wail of misery whose faint echoes only reach us from afar, how painful must be our feelings when the bitter cry which pierces our ears comes from the neighbourhood in which we live, the people among whom we dwell, even from among our own kindred, relatives and friends!

Speaking after the manner of man, God himself, the infinitely blessed one, describes the deep concern He feels, when contemplating the judgments which were impending over his own people — “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee “Israel ? how shall I make thee as Admah ? how shall I set thee as “Zeboim ? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are “kindled together.” (Hosea, xi, 8.). So also, when the loving Redeemer came near Jerusalem, and beheld the city, whose ruin He knew was at hand, He wept over it, saying—“If thou hadst

"known, even then, the things which belong unto thy peace ; but "now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke, xix, 41, 42). As the heart of the Eternal Father throbbed with pity for his peculiar people ; and as Jesus wept over those who were his kindred according to the flesh ; so the hearts of all God's saints have ever been deeply moved by the sufferings, felt, or threatened, of their own kindred and people. Thus when God threatened to destroy the Israelites, because of their worshipping the golden calf, and when already three thousand of them had fallen by the swords of the children of Levi, Moses could so little endure the ruin which was coming on his people, and the destruction of his kindred, that he thus pleads with God—"This people have sinned a great sin, and "have made them gods of gold ; yet now, if thou wilt forgive their "sin—and if not, blot me I pray thee out of thy book which thou "hast written," (Ex. xxxii, 31, 32.) Thus was it also with Queen Esther, when the decree went forth from Ahasuerus, commanding that all the Jews, young and old, men and women, should be cut off. How earnestly does she plead with Ahasuerus to reverse the decree, in these words of the text ! "How can I endure to see the "evil that shall come upon my people? or how can I endure to see "the destruction of my kindred ?" This language of Esther is language which naturally springs from every feeling heart. It is such language as you, my hearers, could not repress if placed in similar circumstances. If you heard that a neighbouring city, town or village in this land was marked out by an invading army for destruction ; or that incendiaries were about to set on fire the homes of your relatives, could you rest quietly in your beds awaiting the result ? Would you not be aroused, not to feeling only, but to action ? Would you not take immediate steps to repel the invader, and to rescue your kindred ?

Now how is it that with feelings and sensibilities so keenly alive to the sufferings of others, and especially of our own kindred and people, we are all so indifferent to the terrible misery and havoc which are wrought among so many homes and families in our own city and neighbourhood by that fell destroyer—strong drink ? How can we, as ministers, rulers and parents, so calmly endure to see the evils which come on our fellow-citizens, and the members of our families, through the drinking usages which prevail

among us? How is it that, like the sons of Jacob, sitting down to eat and drink, while their brother Joseph is famishing in the pit, we can sit down so joyously at our festive boards, while within fifty or a hundred yards of each of our dwellings, there are wretched wives and children, suffering from the madness and brutality of drunken husbands and fathers? How is it that our ears are pained, and our hearts are sick, when we hear of some solitary case of wrong and outrage, of wretchedness and misery, from other causes, and yet have no tears to shed and feel no moral indignation, when most fearful and wide-spread evils and miseries result from the use of strong drink?

How wide-spread these evils and miseries are, you need not that I should inform you. One can scarcely take up a daily newspaper without finding among the items of ordinary intelligence the record of one or more of our neighbours arrested, fined, or imprisoned for disorderly conduct caused by intemperance; or of some hapless citizen or stranger "drinking himself to death," as it is called; or of some case of stabbing or murder resulting from the use of strong drink; or of some drunkard lying down upon the railroad track, and either frozen to death, or torn to pieces by the rail cars, whilst in a state of helpless intoxication; or of a coroner's inquest held over the body of some suicide, who has rushed unbidden before the bar of God, while under the influence of strong drink, and who is charitably represented as labouring under "temporary insanity."

Yet the cases of misery and death which are reported, bear but a small proportion to the unreported cases of wretchedness and woe which result from intemperance. There are hundreds of families in this city, and thousands throughout this province, who bear their trials in silence. There are wives to whom their husbands come home almost every night, at late hours, maddened by strong drink, who bear their hard fate uncomplainingly; or who only whisper their griefs in the ear of some kind Christian friend or pastor, whose remonstrances or prayers they hope may produce some effect in changing their husbands' hearts and habits. There are husbands whose manly hearts are almost broken by the conduct of their wives, who, forgetting the propriety and decorum belonging to their sex, give themselves over to intemperance; and

these husbands never even whisper their trials to their nearest friends. There are fathers and mothers who never speak of the waywardness of their sons, whose intemperate habits are bringing down their grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. Even in those cases where reports of ill-treatment of wives and children by drunken husbands and fathers, reach the public press, or this ill-treatment is made the subject of judicial investigation, it is only for one offence out of fifty that the criminal is exposed, complained of, arrested or punished. In ninety-nine cases, perhaps, out of a hundred, the sufferers suffer in silence ; and oh ! the world of misery and anguish which families endure, unsuspected even by their nearest neighbours !

The misery and ruin which result from the use of strong drink are not confined to any particular rank or class. Intemperance finds its victims among the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned. It reaches the throne and the cabinet, and transforms princes and statesmen into weaklings and fools. It reaches the bench, and reduces its occupant to the level of the culprit at the bar. It reaches the pulpit, and drags the minister of religion down to the mire. It seizes upon men of brilliant genius and splendid talents, on lawyers, physicians, merchants, and mechanics, deprives them of their reason, and makes of them raving maniacs. It dishonours the grey head of age, withers the strength of manhood, and many a generous hearted young man has it sent prematurely to the grave. There is not one of us, whatever be the sphere in which we move, among whose kindred and acquaintances it has not wrought sad havoc and ruin.

If the destruction produced by strong drink were limited to time, and confined to this world; if intemperance were merely ruinous to property, which it wastes; to health, which it shatters; to character, which it blasts; to the comfort of families and homes into which it introduces anguish and misery; if it merely consigned its victims to the asylum, the prison, the penitentiary, or the gallows tree, its evils would surely be sufficiently awful. But, alas ! they terminate not with the things of time, or the sufferings of this world. They stretch into a dark eternal future ; and who can conceive the horrors of that day,

when standing on the left side of the great white throne, in presence of the family whose earthly happiness he destroyed, the drunkard shall hear pronounced upon him the doom that shall consign him to the place of anguish, where he shall for ever vainly ask for a drop of water to satiate his quenchless thirst ?

Such are the evils which result from strong drink ; such the terrible calamities which intemperance has produced, is producing, and still threatens to produce among our neighbours and kindred. It is ruining them for time and for eternity. Now how does it happen, my hearers, that we are so little concerned about this fearful destruction ! How is it that while our hearts are grieved by solitary cases of misery resulting from other causes, we can endure with so much equanimity the wholesale slaughter which is being wrought before our eyes among our own friends and acquaintances, through the use of strong drink ? Is it that the frequency of the evil has blunted our feelings ? Is it that we deem all efforts to stem the tide of intemperance hopeless and impracticable, and therefore turn away our eyes from the spectacle of destruction and misery, as Hagar turned her eyes away from her dying boy ? Is it that we are too pusillanimous and cowardly to set ourselves in opposition to the drinking usages which have obtained the sanction of wealth and fashion ? Is it that we fear damage to our pecuniary interests or personal influence, by lifting up our voices against so popular a vice as intemperance, or against the causes which lead to it ? Or is it that Satan, by some peculiar charm, has so bewitched our minds, and so seared our consciences, as that our hearts are stone, while by means of strong drink he is making havoc among our friends ? Would to God that the spell were broken, and that with respect to the evils resulting from strong drink, as with respect to other evils, we were each impelled with deepest earnestness to adopt the question of Queen Esther, "How can I endure to see the evil that shall come upon my people ? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred ?"

I have hitherto been speaking as if the destruction resulting from strong drink were an evil merely concerning others, but from which we personally were safe. I trust no one will take it for granted that he is secure. We may never have been seen stagger-

ing through the streets; and never have gone beyond the limits of moderate drinking; and may therefore imagine that we are free from danger. It is far otherwise. It is from the class of sober men and moderate drinkers that the army of inebriates obtains its recruits. The moderate drinker of to-day may soon merge into the rank of drunkards. The habit of intemperance comes on imperceptibly, and grows apace. Let none of us, therefore, be high-minded, but fear. There is reason not only that our sensibilities should be aroused on behalf of others: we should have pity on ourselves, and shrink from the ruin to which we are liable.

But supposing all are alive to the fearful destruction which results from intemperance, the question arises: What is to be done? Shall we exhaust our sympathy with the victims of this fearful evil in mere tears and lamentations? Queen Esther did not resign herself to inaction when the ruin of her kindred was threatened. At the peril of her life she returned into the presence of Ahasuerus, that she might plead for their deliverance. At first, indeed, she hesitated; but when her uncle reminded her of her duty and her danger, she returned him the answer, "Go, "gather together all the Jews that are present in Shusan, and fast "ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day; I "also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go unto "the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I "perish." You know the result. She went to the king, and stayed not her efforts till the decree was virtually reversed and her kindred were safe. Should not we, in like manner, use efforts to prevent the death and desolation which spring from intemperance?

There are many things which we may, and ought to do. Thus, like Esther and the Jews, we should humble ourselves before God, confess our sins, and more particularly acknowledge our sin in being accessory, more or less directly, to the intemperance which so extensively prevails; for, if not drunkards ourselves, have we not in various ways given countenance to the intemperate habits of others? We may, moreover, and should plead with God to have mercy upon the community afflicted with such a fearful calamity. As Moses, Samuel, and Daniel pleaded successfully with God for their perishing kindred, so may we. We should also use

our personal and political influence, not merely to secure the enactment of such laws as may seem to mitigate the evil, but also to secure the wise and faithful administration of such excellent enactments on the subject as exist on the Statute Book. There has been much excellent legislation in the right direction, for which we ought to be thankful. But the popular feelings and tastes are too strong to permit the full benefits of the laws being realized. We ought, therefore, to do our best to leaven the public mind with right views on the subject.

Still further, we may, and should deal directly with drunkards, both with those who are confirmed drunkards, and with those who are evidently in danger of becoming confirmed drunkards. We should try to rescue them. We should reason and plead with them. We should tell them earnestly and affectionately of the misery they are bringing upon themselves and their families. We should tell them of their guilt before God. We should tell them that they are virtually guilty of murder and suicide—that they are shortening their own lives, and the lives of others. We should tell them of the fearful destiny which awaits the drunkard—a destiny which involves misery and woe, compared with which all the shame and anguish endured in this world are but as a drop to the ocean. We should tell them, at the same time, of the mercy of God in Christ which is ready to forgive their past sins, and of the grace which is able in the future to keep them from falling. Such reasonings God has often blessed; and such reasonings, therefore, we may hopefully urge.

We may, and I think ought, to do more. Paul says (Rom. xiv, 21,) "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended or is made weak," and also, (1 Cor. viii, 13,) "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Acting on the principles thus indicated—the principles of Christian charity and Christian expediency—we are called on to deny ourselves the use of intoxicating drinks by which so many of our brethren and kindred are destroyed. I enter not now into any discussion as to whether, in any circumstances, it may be lawful to use as a beverage such wines or strong drinks as are now generally used. I ask you to consider the

actual facts. You know that thousands and tens of thousands are perishing from the use of intoxicating drinks. You know that you are under no obligation to use them as a beverage—that you are as much at liberty to abstain from them as Paul was to abstain from wine and flesh. You know that the example of your abstinence may be the means of inducing others to abstain, who can scarcely be saved except by total abstinence on their part, and who would not be likely to become total abstainers if it were understood that none became total abstainers except those who had been well nigh ruined by intemperance. You cannot but feel that you could speak more persuasively to those who are in danger, when urging them to total abstinence, if you could point them to your own example. You generally acknowledge that it is good for ministers of religion to set an example of total abstinence. If the example is a good one, all should follow it. Finally, you know that in denying yourselves even that which is in itself lawful and good, for the sake of others, you are following the example of Christ, who, although he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor—denying himself, not the luxuries merely, but the comforts of life, and submitting to death, that he might save and bless us. Earnestly, therefore, would I urge on you all, for your own sakes, and for the sake of others, to act on the Apostolic principle—"it is "good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing, where—"by thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." I am very far indeed from supposing that mere temperance or any other virtue we practice can save our souls. Salvation comes to us through faith, accepting Christ and that righteousness which is unto all, and upon all them that believe. While, therefore, urging the duty of temperance upon all, I would not the less, but even more earnestly, urge upon each, compliance with the Gospel call—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

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